

Book reviews

People

Sir Oliver Lodge W P Jolly *London: Constable 1974 pp 256 price £3.95*

What do we recall of Sir Oliver Lodge? Undoubtedly most people will remember him as the scientist who more than dabbled in psychical research. It is fitting that this book is subtitled 'Psychical researcher and scientist'.

Biographies of scientists vary considerably in the emphasis given to the subject's early background and professional career. This one gives a very thorough coverage of the subject's childhood and while reading this section I was conscious of looking between the lines for unusual events which may have triggered his interest in spiritualism. I didn't spot any! I found the details of the educational processes in the latter half of the 19th century quite fasci-

nating – in particular, of lecturing to girls at Bedford College, complete with secret entry and chaperone. One normally expects a biographer to feel warmth towards his subject and this certainly appears to apply here. The author clearly takes the side of Lodge in his disagreements with Marconi (through the Marconi Co) and in view of the fact that the author has also published a biography of Marconi this should be an objective decision.

At the age of 30 Oliver Lodge was introduced to psychical research and appointed first Professor of Physics at Liverpool. His main contributions to physics came during his 20 years at Liverpool. Throughout the book the author gives the impression that Lodge was more a planner, negotiator, fund raiser and lecturer extraordinaire than a researcher. He had a particular flair for interpreting new developments in physics and invoking lively discussion.

On his appointment to the post of Principal of the new University of Birmingham in 1900 he presented a paper giving his ideas of a modern university. Many of the suggestions made are relevant to the polytechnics today. Lodge always involved himself in public matters and during his period as Principal his energy

and talent were increasingly devoted to education and socialism.

Throughout his adult life Lodge was interested in both religion and science and often pondered their connection through the ubiquitous ether. Spiritualism played an important role up to his death at the age of 89 when he left a specially prepared message which he intended to serve as a check on his ability as a spirit to communicate with the living. This final experiment was a failure.

This story of the life of Sir Oliver Lodge is well told. It gives a clear impression of both the man and his deeds. R G A KNOTT